

Botanic Garden, April 20th 56

My dear Mr. Dowell, I am afraid when you read my letter you bid me stick to my needle & not meddle with matters I am too ignorant of. But if you could only know how much I have the subject at heart I am sure you would have patience with me! —

I am so anxious to have something done for our poor garden! I have waited & waited hoping other hands might take it up, but seeing nothing done I venture at last to appeal to you, knowing how much interest you take in Botany, & how much your father was interested in the establishment of the garden, & seeing something cannot be done to place this the only Botanic garden in the United States, in a better footing.

It is so miserably poor! All that can be done year after year is barely keep it in order, & that is a happy year when by the fortunate selling of some plants the income is eked out so that the capital is not encroached upon. — The fence is falling to pieces & it is a regular business after every high wind to go round & bolster up the fallen pieces. The green house wants a thorough rebuilding, & is scarcely worth the repairs it needs every

Dr. Gray has nothing to do with my efforts, it is quite my independent affair - but I know well how deeply that he would be  
convinced you are that no any chance of success - very sincerely yours  
Francis May

far. And yet one must say since & soon none have  
done good duty when they have stood the same 45 years.  
That was a sufficient fund so many years ago it  
is easily seen is but a pittance now -

Just now seems an appropriate time to do some-  
thing, for Dr. Gray has changed gardeners, & has an enter-  
prising, young man, a Swiss, educated in Botanical  
garden abroad, who is better qualified to manage the  
garden botanically than any one before. And the City  
are going to widen the street at the end of the garden  
& take off quite a slice, obliging us to move the  
gardener's house & rebuild the fence on that side.

The land that lies behind the screen has never  
been cultivated, but has some fine trees upon it &  
would make a charming arboretum were there only means.

I confess too independently of the actual starving ne-  
cessities, an ambitious plan floats in my head. The land  
opposite us & adjoining the Observatory is for sale. If those  
gentlemen who are so much interested in the Observatory  
would only buy it! Part of the Observatory grounds are already  
under Dr. Gray's care, & if these could be added to the Bot. gar. could  
afford to take it in charge, we might have a garden & grounds of  
which Boston might justly be proud, & for which posterity might thank  
the present generation! Instead of confessing that in all the vast  
territory of the United States, with such a magnificent flora, the only Botanic  
garden can barely keep 3 1/2 acres in cultivation! And is almost dying of  
inanition. I cannot but feel people would be interested & ready to give  
if only they knew the facts & it were brought before them; and it is this, dear Mrs.  
Lowell, that emboldens me to address you, & ask you if some steps cannot be  
taken to preserve our living beauties & treasures.